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FILE ONE

EX-CIA MAN'S FLIGHT TO MOSCOW STOKES CHARGES OF U.S. BUNGLING  
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WASHINGTON

The Soviet defection of an ex- CIA agent groomed to become a spy-master in Moscow and accused by the United States of selling secrets to the Kremlin has stoked charges U.S. intelligence bungled the case.

Tass news agency announced in Moscow yesterday that the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet (parliament) had granted an asylum request from the ex-agent, Edward Lee Howard, 34, on humanitarian grounds.

Howard, accused by the Justice Department of selling highly damaging intelligence data to Moscow, was the first former CIA agent ever to seek asylum in the Soviet Union, U.S. intelligence sources said.

The Justice Department had been searching for him since last September when he slipped from under the noses of an FBI surveillance team and disappeared, sparking strong Congressional criticism of U.S. counter-intelligence.

Howard sold his secrets to Moscow after he was dismissed from the CIA in 1983, according to FBI officials. They said his disclosures devastated U.S. spy nets in the Soviet Union and apparently to the execution of one key U.S. agent.

"Both the CIA and the FBI are taking a hard look at themselves because of this mistake," Sen. Patrick Leahy, vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, told reporters yesterday. "There were mistakes all around."

The Vermont Democrat said Howard had done serious damage, and more harm was likely to come. "The Soviets are relentless about getting every bid of information he has," he said.

Former CIA official George Carver, now with Georgetown University, told a television audience the CIA had erred in not keeping a closer watch on Howard after he had failed a CIA lie detector test and been accused of drug use in 1983.

Howard was dismissed and allowed to go his own way.

"He was told too much too soon -- too many details," Carver said, referring to Howard's CIA training to become a spy-master in Moscow.

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He was never sent to Moscow, but intelligence sources said his training included details which, when disclosed to Moscow, allowed Kremlin counter-spies to roll up the U.S. networks.

Howard told CIA colleagues soon after being fired that he was thinking of selling secrets to Moscow to extract revenge, intelligence sources said. But despite this he was not put under surveillance until he was fingered as a spy by Soviet defector Vitaly Yurchenko, who later redefected to Moscow.

After leaving the CIA, Howard went to work for the New Mexico state legislature. He is thought to have fled to the Soviet Union via Mexico after a tip-off from Moscow.

American intelligence sources yesterday took some consolation in what they said was the likelihood Howard would lead a miserable life in the Soviet Union.

"It is colder in Moscow than it was in New Mexico," a Justice Department official said.

P Ex- CIA Director William Colby, who termed Howard "a tawdry little man who sold his country out," said the defector would probably end up with a tedious job and lead a lonely life.

"It couldn't have happened to a nicer guy," Colby said.